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Indications of Fraud in the Serbian Election

Various sources suggest that Milosevic and his supporters engaged in systematic fraud that probably was decisive in keeping the presidential election from going to a second round:

- CSCE election observers characterized the election as seriously flawed; they estimated that at least 5 percent of prospective voters, most of whom probably would have supported the opposition, were not allowed to participate.

- A member of the Serbian electoral board resigned last night, claiming the board had become an arm of the Serbian government.
- Monitors also reported an instance in which opposition party representatives were dismissed from the multiparty election commission and the police were called to remove them for alleged disruption.
- Other election-day problems noted by some international observers included intimidation of voters and low standards of secrecy at polling places.
- The democratic opposition claimed voter rolls included deceased persons and fraudulent addresses, and individuals were caught casting more than one ballot.

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BALKAN CRISIS: Fraud Unlikely To End Stalemate

Although Serbian President Milosevic appears headed for a first-round election victory, in part on the strength of allegedly widespread fraud, the relatively strong support for the Serbian opposition probably will ensure a continued stalemate between him and federal leaders.

Early unofficial returns indicate that the ruling Socialists and the democratic opposition are each polling about 30 percent in the Serbian and federal legislative elections. Ultranationalist leader Vojislav Seselj's party probably will gain about 20 percent of the vote. Federal Prime Minister Panic is charging widespread fraud and demanding that the election be repeated within 90 days. The democratic opposition has cited numerous voting irregularities, including unsealed ballot boxes, the lack of opposition ballots at polling places, and flawed voter rolls.

Preliminary election results from Montenegro indicate that the ruling Democratic Party of Socialists could gain an absolute majority of seats in the republic legislature and a majority of Montenegro's seats in the lower house of the federal assembly. Parties favoring weaker ties to Serbia generally did not fare well. Incumbent Montenegrin President Bulatovic, a former protege of Milosevic, is leading in the presidential race but probably will face former Yugoslav presidency member Branko Kostic—who has taken an even stronger pro-Serbian line and is supported by Serb ultranationalists—in a runoff on 5 January.

Comment: Despite Milosevic's manipulation of the election, the stalemate between the federal government and the Serbian republic is likely to continue; Yugoslav politics almost certainly will become even more polarized. With Montenegrin help, the democratic opposition may be able to secure control of the federal assembly, frustrate Milosevic's initiatives, strengthen federal President Cosic, and even reappoint Panic as prime minister. The relatively lackluster showing of the Serbian Socialists, however, probably will force Milosevic into a coalition with Serb ultranationalists, which will move Serbian politics even further to the right. There is no indication that Milosevic will alter his authoritarian leadership style. He is still revered by many Serbs, and he will continue to challenge his constituents to have the courage to endure sanctions and achieve Serbia's national goals. The strong showing of the Montenegrin Socialists and other pro-Serb parties in Montenegro, meanwhile, will help legitimize the rump federation and undercut calls by proindependence parties for Montenegro to secede.

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